



HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS RELATED TO FARMERS' SUICIDES

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture is an important occupation in India. Many people are dependent on agriculture for their income. The low productivity which is led by the deterioration of soil has resulted in low income for the farmers. Over the period of time, the farmers have become indebted of heavy amounts. The indebtedness extent has been studied by various organizations over the period of time. Ultimately, it has resulted into farmers ending up their lives due to the mounting pressures from the money lenders. It not only leads to pressure on the farmer itself but also on the family. There is a cause-and-effect relationship between the pressures being felt by farmer and family members. At times, the farmer is not able to cope up with the pressure on himself and at times, the farmer is not able to accept the building pressure on the family members. In the name of inheritance, the responsibility of family comes along with the debt on the younger generation. All this situation leads to a lot of human rights violations of the farmers and also family members. The paper is an attempt to analyze the human rights violations that exists. The paper will highlight a list of human rights which gets violated as a result of farmers' suicide. This is an analytical paper based on the analysis drawn out the existing secondary data.

KEYWORDS: Agriculture, Farmers' Suicides, Human Rights, Indebtedness.

INTRODUCTION:

Agriculture is one of the most important sources of income for Indian farmers. Agriculture is regarded to be the strength of the Indian economy, based on its contribution to national income. In India, agricultural activities provide a major source of income for about 55 to 60 percent of the population (Ministry of Agriculture, Print Release, RBI, MOSPI, Central Statistics Office (CSO), Union Budget 2021-22). The agricultural sector's contribution of total GDP in the pre-independence era was roughly 37%, but after independence, the percentage climbed to 56.5 percent in 1950-51, then dropped to 45.9% in 1970-71. Agriculture accounted for around 13.9 percent of GDP in 2011-12 (Sundharam, Datt, & Mahajan, 2013). Agriculture's percentage of GDP increased to 19.9% in 2020-21, up from 17.8% in 2019-20, which was a surprise in the COVID period. During this time only the agriculture sector marked a positive growth of 3.4 per cent (Economic Survey, 2020-21), while the other sectors slid.

As a result, agriculture continues to be the single or primary source of income for a considerable portion of India's people. According to the 2001 census, 166 million people, or 56.6 percent of the population, were involved in 'Agriculture and associated activities,' although this figure fell to 54.6 percent in 2011 (402.2 million). Despite the fact that the decline is just about 2%, given the importance of agriculture, this drop demonstrates the profession's suffering. The figures show that the number of persons interested in farming as a primary occupation is declining, i.e., less people are interested in farming as a primary employment.

Agriculture in India is definitely a high-stress and difficult job with an unpredictable end. Changing farming techniques, have added to the pressures that have always been linked with agricultural production. Farmers' issues are exacerbated by a variety of risk factors. Farmers' suicides are the most serious issue, notwithstanding class and regional differences. According to the National Crimes Record Bureau's 2019 Report (NCRB), there were 1,39,123 suicides in India in 2019, with 10,281 suicides in the farming industry, including 5,957 farmers/cultivators and the remaining 4,324 agricultural labourers. There were 5,563 males and 394 females among the 5,957 farmer/cultivator suicides in 2019, and 3,749 males and 575 females were among the 4,324 agricultural labourers' suicides.

The country's growth rate and economic development have been good features, but there is a pressing need to recognise the farmers' rising feeling of despair and disillusionment. Despite the fact that the green revolution enhanced productivity and improved the economic situation of well-off farmers, there is a bad side to this progress. Farmers are becoming increasingly frustrated as a result of the Green Revolution's shortcomings. To maintain the crop, farmers were forced to apply increasing amounts of fertilisers and pesticides on their land. Large fertiliser, seed, and pesticide businesses developed enormous marketing operations to promote their goods, leading in excessive usage of these inputs and worrying rates of groundwater depletion and soil degradation. Peasant indebtedness was also caused by a lack of coherence between institutional credit, the price support system, and the cost of inputs. They were enslaved by debts owed to banks, moneylenders, and commission agents. (Ameen & Raza, 2017)

Another rising tendency is the conventional marketing structure for crops, fruits, and vegetables, which has grown unfavourable to farmers since dealers and

intermediaries capture a large portion of consumer money. Farmers receive cheap payments for their crops, but customers must pay a greater price for sub-standard products on the market.

Despite their substantial reliance on agriculture, farmers' conditions are hardly promising. Farmers' suicides in Maharashtra's Vidarbha area, Punjab's Malwa region, and other Indian states have been documented in recent decades. Farmers' problems are no longer limited to agricultural output; regular demonstrations over the Minimum Support Price (MSP) that farmers are unable to get from the government for varied commodities are now causing worries.

Farmers make up a sizable portion of the country's population. However, that composition comprises a variety of farmer types, including large farmers, marginal farmers, and small farmers. According to the Indian agricultural census, large farmers are those who own more than 5 acres of land. The marginal farmers have land under 1 hectare, whereas the small farmers have land between 1 and 2 hectares.

THE MAGNITUDE OF FARMERS' SUICIDES AND INDEBTEDNESS:

The scale of farmer suicide has been calculated using data from government agencies such as the National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB) and the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) (NSSO). The NCRB data shows the amount of farmer suicides, but the NSSO data shows the many factors that influence farmer suicides. Due to the lack of alternate or shadow reports to assess the data's dependability, there may be issues regarding its validity. However, this information has been used to get insight into suicide patterns and occurrences.

The NSSO assessed the incidence of indebtedness among farmer families in Punjab to be 65.4 percent in its 59th* cycle. (Situation Assessment Survey of Farmers: Farmer Household Indebtedness, 2005). It further reported that in 2002, Punjab had the highest average outstanding loan per farmer household. However, a study performed by Prof. Anupama and colleagues from Punjabi University in 2017 indicated that 85.9% of farming households and about 80% of agricultural labour households in Punjab are in debt (Singh et al, 2017).

HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS:

When looking at the situation through the lens of human rights, it is clear that not only the farmers but also their family members have suffered grave human rights violations. The following are the various human rights violations that exist:

1. **Concern of Right to life:** When a person's right to life, which includes a fair quality of living, is threatened, he or she must consider taking out a loan to survive. The simple fact that a loan is required raises questions regarding farmers' right to life. Inability to repay loans leads to debt traps owing to rising interest rates, since their first choice for a loan is non-institutional sources due to the ease of the procedure. According to the NABARD All India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey 2016-17 report, the national rate of household indebtedness is 47 percent. Farmers become crucial in an agriculture-driven country like India. Farmers across the country, however, have become marginalised over time and are sure to confront a variety of issues. However, it appears that the farmers' expectations of stakeholders' help are not being met. The government has turned a blind

eye to the farmers' difficulties, despite the fact that their problems are on the rise. Every planting season, Indian farmers are obliged to purchase expensive seeds, trapping them in debt and forcing them to commit suicide (Banerjee, 2017). The right to life issue isn't only about living in a safe environment. It is a broader right that includes concerns about livelihood, the right to work, and living in dignity and respect, all of which have been addressed below.

2. Right to dignity and respect: The right to life also encompasses the right to a dignified existence. The term 'dignity,' which comes from the Latin word *dignus* or *dignitas*, denotes 'a specific regard or merit of admiration and honour' (Sarkar, 2007). Scholars have debated the question of labour dignity extensively. Despite the fact that the term "labour" conveys a strong feeling of dignity to workers, the wisdom of a private ownership market economy's moral and ethical commitment is revealed by its ability to value human beings as a resource. Farmers have traditionally been concerned about social estrangement. They always feel as though they are being pushed out of society due to their debt-ridden status. When it comes to farmers, their right to dignity and respect is restricted, especially when it comes to debt-ridden farmers. Section 2 of the Protection of Human Rights Act guarantees the right to life and to live with dignity and respect. To fully enjoy the right to a dignified existence, a human must also live in a fear-free environment. In the case of farmers, the freedom from fear of social alienation becomes a critical paradigm for exercising their right to life. Freedom from fear will enable the farmer to face life's challenges with confidence. Even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises fearlessness as a basic human right. As a result, it is critical to guarantee this right to every human being in general, and farmers in particular.

3. Right to livelihood: The right to livelihood is an important component of the right to life that does not exist in an implied form, but was explicitly incorporated into the right to life by the Supreme Court of India in the "Pavement Dwellers Case" of 1985 (Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation, 1986 AIR 180, 1985 SCR Supl. (2) 51). The Supreme Court has ruled that the right to life (as defined by Article 21) includes the right to a decent living. No one can exist without means of subsistence, hence the right to life would be meaningless if the right to livelihood was not included.

The predicament of Indian farmers is in direct violation of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. Along with self-sustenance, there is an essential component to consider: the investment or source of income. Because the amount of land accessible to each family has stayed constant while the number of family members has increased in rural regions, sustaining all of them solely via agriculture is becoming increasingly challenging. People are migrating to cities in search of work, yet positions are not always accessible, partially due to a lack of skills. The government, through the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), is working to address these issues by promoting location-specific integrated/composite farming systems, soil and moisture conservation measures, comprehensive soil health management, and mainstreaming rainfed technologies.

4. Right to Compensation: The Supreme Court ruled that property rights are part of human rights, and that landowners have a right to just compensation for land taken by the government.

The Fundamental Right to Property has the distinction of being not only the second most contentious clause in the Constitution's writing, but also the most changed section, and finally the fundamental right to be eliminated in 1978. The Constitution (Twenty-fifth Amendment) Act of 1971 limited the right to property and allowed the government to acquire private property for public use in exchange for compensation decided by Parliament rather than the courts.

"The right to property having been elevated to the status of human rights, it is inherent in every individual, and thus has to be venerably acknowledged and can, by no means, belittled or trivialised by adopting an unconcerned and nonchalant disposition by anyone, much less the State, after compulsorily acquiring his land by invoking an expropriatory legislative mechanism," wrote a bench of Justices V Gopala Gowda and Amitava Roy (The Times of India, 2015). According to the court, the government has a constitutional obligation to ensure that the landowner is fairly compensated. Other rights, it argued, become illusory in the absence of the right to property, which the state must preserve.

Farmers, as individuals, are unable to exercise the most fundamental human right, namely the right to live in dignity and respect. The majority of determinants have a direct relationship with farmers, but they also infringe people's human rights in general. As a result, the current agricultural patterns in our nation, and particularly in Punjab, not only violate the human rights of farmers and their families, but also have an influence on the broader population. They are compelled to eat chemical-based foods.

They are compelled to consume the chemical-based food that is created. Farmers and the general public have been placed in a scenario where there are fewer non-chemical food alternatives. Organic farming, on the other hand, is increasing pop-

ularity with time, but the costs at which it is offered are not in everyone's budget. Essentially, the majority of the people is still reliant on the products supplied by the majority of farmers. Even organic farmers are scarce, since it demands both time and money inputs, making it difficult for small farmers to switch to nature-based organic agriculture.

CONCLUSION:

Moving beyond empiricism's epistemic constraints and adopting a critical realism approach can assist uncover the origins of social phenomena. However, with more research and inquiry, direct and indirect causes, as well as mixed causes, can be discovered. Many studies focusing primarily on macroeconomic causes fail to adequately capture the underlying causes at the micro level; they also make it a homogeneous analysis without being sensitive to issues related to certain dead farmers belonging to lower castes and classes, and, most importantly, the specificities of the women suicide victims. The studies can be used to establish some broad generalisations about the reasons of farmer suicides.

At the macro level, indebtedness caused by monsoon failure over the years, excessive use of fertilisers and pesticides resulting in soil fertility degradation, GM seeds and spurious seed quality, government policy of liberalising the agriculture sector, and ineffectiveness of credit institutions were the main causes that prompted small and marginal farmers to commit suicide.

Second, at the micro level in rural Punjab, the socio-cultural milieu had a significant role in exacerbating agricultural hardship. Furthermore, the research revealed that the causes of agricultural misery were not limited to primarily economic and farm-related variables. On a local level, there were other causes that exacerbated the rural economic and ecological catastrophe.

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